4-2019

Faith and Disbelief

Robert K. Whitaker
Marquette University, robert.whitaker@marquette.edu

Faith and Disbelief

Robert K. Whitaker
(Forthcoming in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*)

The purpose of this paper is to show that faith is compatible with disbelief. More precisely, faith that p, where p is some declarative sentence expressing a proposition, is at least sometimes compatible with disbelief that p (belief that not-p).[1] In what follows, I will offer several arguments for this thesis and respond to some objections. First, however, some background is in order.

I. Faith-that and Faith-in

Typically faith is thought of in terms of belief. This includes both religious faith and more general forms, such as faith in a spouse or a sports team, or faith that one's plans will succeed. In recent years, however, many have proposed understandings of faith that are importantly distinct from the standard propositional picture.[2] Robert Audi (2008) lists no less than seven types of faith common in English, and others not on his list have been proposed. The most important recent discussions for my purposes are those of Audi (2008), William Alston (1996), J.L. Schellenberg (2005) and (2016), Daniel Howard-Snyder (2013a) and (2013b), and Jonathan Kvanvig (2016). The common thread in all of these authors is an attempt to separate faith from

[1] I here follow the standard usage of "propositional faith" in the literature. For my purposes, I need not take a position on the interesting and complicated question of what a proposition is, other than the general consensus that it is the referent of that-clauses and the object of the "propositional attitudes," which include belief, desire, doubt, hope, intention, etc.

[2] One might wonder here if there really is such a "standard" picture of faith. I think this a fair question, though it is unfortunately not one that I have the space to explore here. It is an interesting, and I think open, question to what extent various important historical thinkers took propositional belief to be essential to, or even related to, faith, and were we to go in that direction, we would undoubtedly find many valuable nuanced and sophisticated views that might serve as exceptions to the "standard picture" (Kierkegaard, for example, certainly has much to teach us here). Nonetheless, I think it relatively uncontroversial that the predominant understanding of religious faith remains tied to belief (whether occurrent or dispositional) in various propositions. At any rate, all of the participants in the discussion that I am entering take this for granted.

belief. Typically, this takes the form of suggesting that the cognitive component of faith can be understood as something distinct from belief, as in Alston, Audi, Howard-Snyder, and early Schellenberg. Others, including Kvanvig and later Schellenberg, move away from cognitive forms of faith altogether, opting instead for an understanding of faith that is primarily affective, conative, and/or ethical. The primary division in the literature is between propositional and non-propositional faith, also referred to more loosely as "faith-that" and "faith-in," a distinction drawn by Alston in his (1996). Another way of putting the distinction is to say that faith can be thought of as either having an essential cognitive component, or as having no such component (or having it only non-essentially). To say that faith has an essential cognitive component is to say that, whatever else it may be, to have faith involves mental states (whether occurrent or dispositional), the content of which is a relation to a proposition or set of propositions. Thus, "faith-that" is faith *that p*, while "faith-in" is faith in a person or ideal, with the relation to propositions about the person or ideal left unspecified or accorded only peripheral significance. Accounts of faith as non-propositional include faith as attitude (Clegg 1979), affective faith (Kvanvig 2016), faith as practical commitment (Tennant 1943), faith as non-cognitive or ethical (Schellenberg 2016), and faith as hope (Pojman 1986). My argument will focus primarily on faith-that, though I believe that either form of faith is compatible with disbelief. Within faith-that, the primary distinction is between "doxastic" and "non-doxastic" views. On the doxastic view, faith is either an instance of belief or is partially constituted by it, or, more weakly, faith entails belief.[3] On the non-doxastic view, faith is not even partially constituted by belief, and the cognitive component is filled by some propositional attitude other than belief. Some major proposals here include acceptance (Alston 1996), trust (Audi 2008), assent (Schellenberg 2005),

[3] See, for example, Mugg (2016).

and assuming (Howard-Snyder 2013a and 2013b). Before proceeding to my arguments, it will be useful to consider some of these non-doxastic proposals.

II. Suggestions for Non-doxastic Faith

The strategy for those who want to articulate a non-doxastic form of propositional faith has been to suggest a suitable substitute to play the cognitive role normally played by belief. In order to see what this would require, one must first know something about what beliefs are. In his discussion-framing essay "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," William Alston provides two broad characterizations of belief: (1) It is dispositional, and (2) It is not under direct voluntary control.[4] To say that belief is dispositional is to distinguish it from occurrent mental states, actions, or processes; beliefs are dispositions to do certain things under certain conditions, but they are not themselves the doing.[5] Alston helpfully provides a partial list of the dispositions that constitute belief:

1. If S believes that p, then if someone asks S whether p, S will have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
2. If S believes that p, then if S considers whether it is the case that p, S will tend to feel it to be the case that p, with one or another degree of confidence.
3. If S believes that p, then S will tend to believe propositions that he or she takes to follow from p.
4. If S believes that p, then S will tend to use p as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
5. If S believes that p, then if S learns that not-p, S will tend to be surprised.
6. If S believes that p, then S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p, given S's goals, aversions, and other beliefs.[6]

---

[4] Alston (1996), 4-12.

[5] The sense of "dispositional" in this sentence should not be confused with *dispositionalism* about belief, the view that one's mental and behavioral dispositions constitute belief. See next footnote.

[6] Ibid, 4. Of course, one may suggest counterexamples to these dispositions. For example, if one is told a secret, one will not have a tendency to respond in the affirmative when asked whether p, even if she believes p. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.) However, Alston does not say here that one's dispositional responses cannot or should not be overridden, nor that he has exhausted the list of dispositions that are constitutive of belief. Nonetheless, nothing in my argument depends on Alston's dispositionalism being the correct analysis of the nature of belief. It simply provides a handy way to frame the issue. If one takes another of the major representative views of belief, my argument will work just as well. For example, if one is a representationalist about belief, à la Fodor

Call this list a "response profile." To say that S believes that p is to say that S is disposed to the tendencies toward p enumerated in the response profile. To say that belief is not under direct voluntary control, on the other hand, is to say that it is not within one's powers to effect change in one's belief states, either immediately, or often even indirectly. One may, if she wishes, undertake certain action plans with the goal of changing some belief or other (say, reading a book or talking with a friend), but this may fail, and importantly, it takes more than just an act of will.

With these two features of belief in hand, Alston draws a distinction between belief and acceptance. Acceptance, like belief, is a propositional attitude, but it is distinct in the following two ways: A. It is not a disposition to a response profile regarding a proposition, but rather involves the *act* of adopting or "taking on" a positive attitude towards the proposition. B. Acceptance is a voluntary act. Some notes on these two distinctions: first, while not itself a disposition, acceptance "engenders a complex dispositional state," which Alston, following L. Jonathan Cohen, calls a "policy."[7] To accept a proposition is to take on a policy concerning how one will act in relation to a proposition, regardless of one's belief about its truth (or lack thereof).

(1975) or Dretske (1988), one could interpret my claim about faith as the simultaneous possession of internal representations of both "not-p" and something like "p is important to me," accompanied by the right sorts of cognitive uses, e.g. that p is not called up in theoretical inferences, but is called up in deliberations about what one should do. We might say that the representation of p is tokened in the subject's "faith box" but not her "belief box." (One could then understand what the non-doxasticists like Howard-Snyder have been doing as spelling out the requirements for a representation to be in the "faith box.") A response profile similar to Alston's could be formulated with representationalist assumptions, and my arguments about faith and disbelief would hold mutatis mutandis. Alternatively, if one is an interpretationist about belief, à la Dennett (1987), then the claim would be simply that from the intentional stance, it is sometimes appropriate to attribute both disbelief and faith regarding p to a subject at a time. And of course, if one is an eliminativist, à la Churchland (1981), then both disbelief and faith are equally unreal, and describing their consistency would be a job for a neuroscientist. On that view, to be in the sort of situation I describe would be to have a complex neural state that simultaneously results in the denial of p, the confirmation that p is important to one, and behaviors which indicate that p plays a significant role in one's life. For an excellent overview of theoretical approaches to belief, see Schwitzgebel (2015), esp. section one. On the other hand, see Schwitzgebel (2001), section III, for an argument that a dispositional account of belief is best able to handle cases of "in-between belief."

[7] Ibid, 9.

This dispositional state will in fact closely resemble the response profile of belief above, with one main difference: 2 will be absent. That is, if one accepts p rather than believing it, she will not tend to feel it to be the case that p when she considers it. In fact, this is precisely why she *accepts* it rather than believes it. Acceptance is what one does with a proposition in order to proceed with the relevant actions, when one is unable to form a clear belief about it. I cannot say with much confidence that I believe that nominalism about abstract objects is true, but I accept the proposition, and act accordingly (I am disposed to defend it against objections, etc.). Second, to say that acceptance is voluntary does not mean that one can always accept just any proposition regardless of her situation (e.g. I could not choose to accept the proposition—without some serious work—that I am a brain in a vat). However, one can typically choose among the live propositions available to her which to accept, and even when she cannot, she may often be able to withhold acceptance. But what about situations where a decision is "forced," to use William James's language? Even here, says Alston, one may adopt an *assumption* on which to proceed, which is a weaker cognitive state than acceptance. The difference is instructive: accepting that p involves a stronger positive attitude—a "pro-attitude"—than merely assuming that p. To accept that p is to "regard it as true," even though one lacks the belief that it is true.[8] One "takes a stand" on its truth for practical purposes, whereas in assuming one needn't take such a stand.

I say this difference is instructive; here's how. All of the proposals for non-doxastic propositional models of faith have followed Alston's lead: they posit that the role of belief in faith can be filled by an epistemically weaker cognitive attitude, and they provide a list of conditions that the attitude must meet to fill this role. Alston provides two such conditions: (1) faith-that must involve a pro-attitude towards its object. One must look on the prospect of p's

[8] Ibid, 11.

being true with favor. Note that this is not necessary for belief—I may believe wholeheartedly that a certain candidate will win the election, but consider this a damnable tragedy. (2) Faith-that implies a weak epistemic position with respect to p. If one's evidence for p is conclusive, it is generally out of place to describe one as having faith that p. Add to these conditions the third that faith-that requires something to fill the cognitive role vacated by belief, and one is able to look for propositional attitudes consistent with the first two conditions. For Alston, acceptance fits the bill nicely. For others, different propositional attitudes work better. As mentioned above, the primary proposals for this role are acceptance, trust, assent, and assuming.[9] Describing each of these in detail would take us too far afield, but I will say a word about each, as it will help to set the stage for the argument of the next section.

Robert Audi argues that faith is best understood as a kind of *trust*. He labels this "fiducial" faith, and he goes to lengths to distinguish his proposal from Alston's. He agrees that faith-that requires a pro-attitude toward p, and that volition plays an important role for faith that it does not play for belief.[10] He also agrees that faith-that implies a weak epistemic position, or at least insufficient confidence for belief.[11] But he denies that acceptance is the right candidate to fill this role, as it is too close to belief: "I grant that some cases of propositional faith may also be cases of cognitive acceptance; but the latter typically implies belief."[12] That is, if I accept what you say, this typically implies that I come to believe it. Additionally, Audi takes issue with the characterization of acceptance as voluntary action, especially when applied to religious cases.

---

[9] These are the primary proposals, but they are by no means the only proposals in the literature for alternatives to essentially doxastic faith. In addition to these, Kvanvig lists "presupposition, supposition, opinion, affirmation, confidence, and mental assents … suspicion, speculation, and expectancy along with the attitudes of taking a stance on an issue or cause, making an intellectual commitment, and the notion of judgment itself." See Kvanvig (2018), 81.

[10] Audi (2008), 90.

[11] Ibid, 96.

[12] Ibid, 91.

"What," he asks, "is the 'voluntary act' whose result is entering a cognitive (truth-valued) state, such as belief that God has a plan for humanity?"[13] In place of acceptance, Audi proposes trust, which involves both a strong pro-attitude (one does not trust that p unless one has a positive appraisal of p's being true), and a weak epistemic position ("The closer one comes to being altogether sure…the less appropriate it is to say 'I trust that.'"), but has the benefit of being more clearly distinguishable from belief.[14] It is also more clearly related to faith-in, which makes it more easily applicable to religious faith, as this is often (at least in the West) understood as involving faith in a person.

In his 2005 book *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion*, J.L. Schellenberg proposes *voluntary assent* as the proper cognitive attitude to replace belief in propositional faith. With Alston and Audi, Schellenberg affirms that faith-that requires weak evidence and a "favorable evaluation" of the truth or desirability of p.[15] He adds to this the "policy of tenaciously representing to oneself the state of affairs thus favorably assessed," or a "policy of assenting."[16] This involves imagining the state of affairs represented by p, and "deliberately going along with" it, in the sense of consciously choosing to represent the truth of p to oneself in a positive fashion, as with a runner who repeatedly affirms to himself before a big race what he does not believe:

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 97.

[15] Schellenberg (2005), 133-4. Schellenberg takes issue with Alston's "pro-attitude," opting instead for the weaker "favorable evaluation" of the state of affairs reported by the proposition p. This is because he thinks pro-attitude includes a *desire* for the truth of p, which is more than is needed for propositional faith. Indeed, he presents a case which he thinks shows that one can have faith that p with no desire at all for p: a politician obliged out of party loyalty to campaign for a former rival—she may have faith that the rival will win while not desiring it. Cf. Howard-Snyder (2013b), 183-85. For my money, Schellenberg overstates the case a bit, and Howard-Snyder is right to conclude that "even if one can have faith that p without desire for the truth of p, one cannot have faith that p without a desire *in virtue of which one cares that p*." (p. 185, emphasis mine) I take this latter to be the primary import of the "pro-attitude" locution. In any case, this needn't concern us any further, as nothing in my argument turns on whether or not the pro-attitude includes desire.

[16] Ibid, 134.

that he will do well.[17] The focus here is on the *acting on* the cognitive state (assent), rather than on the state itself, as with acceptance. Indeed, this is what distinguishes assent in Schellenberg's sense from merely *assuming*; in the latter, one treats the truth of p as granted (probably for the sake of some practical end), and then lets it recede into the background, whereas in the former, one must continually actively affirm the truth of p to oneself.[18] The latter state, says Schellenberg, is more deserving of the title "faith" than any account with an insufficient focus on this continued voluntary activity. The *voluntary* bit is crucial for him, and he cashes it out via three clauses: the "accessibility" clause (faith is available to anyone who wants it), the "terminability" clause (it can be gotten rid of by anyone who no longer wants it), and the "vulnerability" clause (it will be lost if not actively sustained).[19]

Lastly, Daniel Howard-Snyder argues that the propositional attitude component of faith-that should be characterized as "assuming." Assuming differs from Schellenberg's assenting primarily with respect to how well it accords with being in doubt about p (one may easily assume p for practical purposes while being in doubt about the truth of p, something Howard-Snyder thinks is difficult for assenting, even in Schellenberg's voluntary sense).[20] He helpfully articulates (with tables!) that there are four necessary constituents (he stops short of saying, as Schellenberg does, that they are jointly sufficient) for the complex propositional attitude that is faith that p, and each constituent may be variously instantiated. We end up with this:

A positive evaluation of p	
A positive conative orientation toward p	

[17] Ibid, 130.
[18] Ibid, 135.
[19] Ibid, 147.
[20] Howard-Snyder (2013b), 189-90.

A positive cognitive stance toward p	
Resilience in the face of new evidence contrary to p[21]	

The necessary constituents are on the left side of the table; the empty column on the right signifies that these constituents may be instantiated by multiple things. For example, the role of positive evaluation may be played by the pro-attitude—considering the truth that p to be good or desirable.[22] The positive conative orientation can be one's wanting it to be the case that p, or it may be the higher-order wanting to want it to be the case that p. The positive cognitive stance role can be filled by believing, but also by accepting, assenting, assuming, etc. Finally, the resilience role can be played by any of a number of dispositions to respond in positive ways to new counter-evidence to p. For example, when confronted with counter-evidence, one may adjust her cognitive stance accordingly (say, from full belief down to acceptance), but resist the temptation to be disheartened with respect to p, and resolve to renew her devotion to p in spite of the new evidence and lowered cognitive stance. If all four of these criteria are met, then most likely (again, Howard-Snyder does not claim joint sufficiency) we are dealing with genuine propositional faith.[23]

Such are the major proposals for non-doxastic faith-that. Notice that we do not yet have a *definition* of faith, nor even an uncontroversial suggestion for what is essential to faith. Indeed, the word is used so variously, and intuitions even among philosophers range so widely, that some have despaired of seeking a definition. Speaking of trust (though the same can be said of faith), Thomas Simpson says, "Counterexamples [to a proposed definition] can be given so

[21] Howard-Snyder (2013a), 367-8.

[22] Howard-Snyder says here that this "considering" could potentially be replaced by other positive cognitive stances, though he does not suggest any.

[23] Ibid, 368.

easily because there are so many ways the word may permissibly be used, and so it would be foolish to seek a single definition."[24] Simpson himself opts for a genealogical methodology, which Kvanvig criticizes and we needn't consider. However, Kvanvig's own method is helpful here: he recommends thinking of faith in a "fundamental" way. As he says,

> …the methodology I favor…focuses on what is important in a given domain. In this domain, I thus focus on what I take to be an important, and perhaps fundamental, kind of faith—'fundamental,' in the sense of being common ground between religious and mundane examples of the phenomenon that is central to a flourishing life.[25]

Leaving aside the thorny issue of what constitutes a "flourishing life," we can take on board Kvanvig's use of "fundamental" faith in a "given domain." Moving forward, I will be considering whether faith in this broad sense—capable of being instantiated religiously or non-religiously, and featuring centrally in at least one domain of a person's life—is compatible with disbelief in the propositions relative to that domain. Further, following the suggestions just mentioned, I will assume that this fundamental faith has a general structure that includes cognitive, conative, affective, and volitional elements. I contend that whatever one's preferred way of cashing this out, a faith of this structure will be compatible, at least in some cases, with disbelief.

Another thing worth noting here is the role of degrees of belief in relation to faith. So far, I have been speaking of cognitive attitudes in a "binary" way, i.e. as an attitude toward a proposition that one either has or lacks.[26] But some would prefer to speak in terms of degrees of belief, or credences. Here the issue for our purposes would be locating the boundary between

[24] Simpson (2012): 553-54. Quoted in Kvanvig (2016), 8.

[25] Kvanvig (2016), 11.

[26] See Titelbaum (forthcoming), 4.

credences which imply weak belief and credences which imply disbelief. How should we do this? Michael Titelbaum notes:

> One might suggest that the confidence threshold for belief is certainty (i.e. 100% confidence). But many of us believe propositions of which we are not certain, and this seems perfectly rational. Working down the confidence spectrum, it seems that in order to believe a proposition one should be more confident of it than not. But that leaves a lot of space to pin down the threshold between 50% and 100% confidence. Here it may help to suggest that the relevant threshold for belief is vague, or varies with context.[27]

So let's say that one disbelieves a proposition when her credence falls below 50%.[28] When one's belief is weak, say a credence of 51%, most will grant that faith is still possible. But it isn't always possible to tell the difference between very weak belief and lack of belief. Say Bill hears something about Susan that dramatically lowers his credence in the proposition that she is loyal to him. If asked how sure he is that she is loyal, he might reply, "Not at all sure," but be unable to assign any particular credence to the proposition that she is loyal, being unsure if he believes that she is or not. It is plausible that Bill may nonetheless continue to have faith that Susan is loyal, perhaps by virtue of some tendency to give the benefit of the doubt to one's friends. Now we should be careful here: if Bill is not sure whether he believes that Susan is loyal, then we should not say that he either believes or disbelieves that she is. He is in a state that is indeterminate between belief and disbelief. We might choose to call this "weak belief," but "lack of belief" seems best.[29] As we have seen, many philosophers will now grant that faith is compatible with such a state, pointing out various cognitive states weaker than belief that could be substituted. But if we can accept that this indeterminate state is compatible with faith, why not

---

[27] Titelbaum (forthcoming), 15.

[28] Or perhaps this is not right: maybe it would be better to say that one *doubts* a proposition when her credence falls below 50%, and that disbelief does not occur until further down the credence spectrum. Then the problem becomes locating the boundary between doubt and disbelief.

[29] Or, per Schwitzgebel (2001), "in-between belief." Also see that paper, pp. 78-79, for an argument that Bayesian degrees of belief do not adequately capture the ambiguity of such attitudes.

accept that disbelief is? Presumably this is because there is an apparent non-arbitrary distinction between lack of belief and disbelief: in the latter case, one takes it to be more likely than not that p is false, whereas in the former case one does not. But there are some cases, I think, where one will take not-p to be more likely than not, but will nonetheless want to maintain that she has faith in p. In what follows, I will offer some reasons to think this is possible.

Alternatively, on a dispositional account of belief such as Alston's, a belief may admit of variation with respect to the level of conformation to the response profile for that belief. For example, Bill may "believe" that Susan is loyal to him in the sense that: 1. if asked whether he believes that she is, he would tend to respond in the affirmative, 2. he tends to believe propositions that he takes to follow from the proposition that Susan is loyal, and 3. he would tend to use the proposition that Susan is loyal in his practical reasoning where appropriate. But he may "disbelieve" that Susan is loyal to him in the sense that: 4. when he considers whether it is the case that she is loyal, he does not tend to feel it to be the case, 5. if he learned that she was not loyal, he would not tend to be surprised, and 6. he does not tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if Susan were loyal, given his goals, aversions, and other beliefs. Thus Bill fulfills half of Alston's suggested response profile for belief but not the other half.[30] In such a case it will be difficult to tell if Bill believes that Susan is loyal to him, though he may still have faith that she is. Again, in what follows, I will argue that even if it is appropriate to say that Bill disbelieves the relevant proposition, it will in some cases also be appropriate to say that Bill has faith in the proposition.

Before turning to my arguments for this, note that I will not first argue for the weaker thesis that faith is compatible with *lack* of belief, as I take the case for this to have been

[30] Again, I do not mean to imply here that the dispositional account of belief is the correct one. See note 6.

sufficiently made by those with whom I am primarily conversing here.[31] Additionally, the presumed success of this prior argument leads us naturally in the direction of admitting that faith that p is compatible with outright disbelief that p; those who have stopped short of this admission do so for reasons that do not withstand reflection, as we will see.

III. Faith and Disbelief

Consider Sarah. Sarah has been a Christian for as long as she can remember, immersed in the culture of American Protestant Christianity. The strength of her commitment to the Christian faith has waxed and waned over the years, reaching a peak in college when she became involved in a rather charismatic campus ministry. For several years, she read her Bible regularly, prayed consistently and passionately, communed with other Christians, and even experienced what she considered to be genuine communications with God. Over time, however, these experiences became less frequent, and at some point in graduate school, Sarah realized that nearly all of the practices she had once associated with her faith (prayer, Bible reading, fasting, etc.) had disappeared from her life. One thing remained constant, however: her immersion in the Protestant Christian culture. All of Sarah's closest friends were Christians, most of a similar theological background as herself, and she still attended church on a semi-regular basis, and felt comfortable and at home there. The recognition that something had changed, however, troubled Sarah, so she set out to discover the cause of her missing faith practices. Over time, Sarah re-examined the faith of her childhood, eventually admitting that she no longer believed in any of the significant doctrinal commitments of her faith tradition. She no longer found the notions of a Trinity or an Incarnation coherent; she saw no reason to attribute anything in nature to God's involvement; and she found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the picture of God that she had

[31] If the reader is interested in more detail on this, I point her to the references, particularly the selections by Alston, Audi, Schellenberg (2005), and Howard-Snyder.

once had with the amount of human and animal suffering she saw around her. This loss of belief was somewhat surprising to Sarah, but it was far from traumatic. It was not as if she had experienced anything drastic that called these faith commitments into question; she could not even remember a period in which she entertained serious doubt about these things. The best she could tell, she simply became busy with graduate school, and the next time she considered it, she *discovered*, as it were, that her belief had gone. Her best guess was that she had developed more critical habits of thought in graduate school, and once she had occasion to apply these to her Christian beliefs, they just could not stand the scrutiny. However—and this was the most puzzling bit, even for Sarah—she had no desire whatsoever to leave the Christian community. In fact, the thought of leaving startled her, and she found herself instead desiring to re-commit to her involvement in her church. She volunteered for childcare on odd Sundays, became involved in a program to help the homeless, and continued giving to her church financially. She even resumed reading the New Testament on occasion, and always found it deeply meaningful and encouraging. To this day, she is often moved to tears by particularly poignant tales of forgiveness or grace. She is known to express her love for the character Jesus to her closer friends, and while she no longer believes in his imminent return to earth, she thinks it would be just wonderful if that were true. Perhaps most significantly, Sarah continues to believe that the moral outlook she has learned from the New Testament and her church tradition is extremely valuable. It seems to her that if more people could embody the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount—which she still struggles to understand—that the world would be vastly improved. Consequently, Sarah is known among her friends as a vocal defender of a Christian love ethic, and she often argues passionately for nonviolence, forgiveness, and reconciliation, even and especially for one's enemies. Even aesthetically, Sarah's life is inextricably bound to the

Christian tradition: her favorite musical artists are almost all Christian, her favorite books are about redemption and new life—she even has a small tattoo of a cross to remind her of the source of meaning in her life.

It does not seem to Sarah that her current "faith" is fundamentally discontinuous with her former "faith," even though she now actively rejects (when asked, which is not often) the propositions that many think would make her historically "Christian." In fact, Sarah does not remember belief in these propositions ever having been very important to her in the past either. She certainly never actively doubted them, but perhaps only because she never really *thought* about them at all. If she had to pick out the essence of her faith, both then and now, it would be something much more experiential: she sees goodness in others, and she experiences both in them and alone in meditation or prayer a sense of divinity or transcendence, though she has difficulty articulating this. She finds that when she puts others before herself and seeks to serve them, her life and theirs take on deeper meaning, and she finds an enduring joy in giving love unconditionally. She also finds the habits of repentance, honesty, and living transparently to be by far the best way to live that she has witnessed. In short, her life has a singular purpose: to locate and bring out the good in others, and in herself, and the Christian story gives this purpose both structure and expression. It seems to her now that the truth value of a set of theological propositions is just irrelevant to the fulfillment of this purpose.

What are we to say about Sarah? Is she right about the relevance, or lack thereof, of propositional belief to faith? What about the relation between her former and latter modes of faith? Are they really continuous as she perceives them to be? More to the point, can we give an account of faith that makes room for people like Sarah, people whose lives are unified by their

faith commitments, yet who straightforwardly disbelieve religious propositions? Should we even try?

We can and we should. That we can will be demonstrated below. But we *should* for two reasons: (1) It may be that some philosophical questions can be adequately answered without consulting case studies or narratives about particular people. Perhaps questions about logical semantics or abstract objects are like this. At any rate, it's hard to see how information about the lives of actual people could contribute to the solutions to these problems. It may even be that this information could *hurt* in certain cases (say, in some questions of ethics or political philosophy where impartiality is taken to be crucial to finding the truth or avoiding error). But other philosophical questions are definitely not like this. Indeed, some questions are only salient because they have arisen out of the normal experience of many people, and they persist because, owing to the complexity of these experiences, their answers are proportionately evasive. The question of faith is of this latter kind. We want to know what faith is *because* so many people take it to be of paramount importance to their lives, and because they seem to experience it so differently. Therefore, an account of faith that was not sensitive to—indeed, oriented around—the actual experiences of these people would be wrongheaded.[32] (2) It is independently philosophically interesting whether there is an account of faith that is compatible with disbelief. If there is, then virtually all of the discussion on this point in the literature is mistaken. This would surely be an instructive mistake, as the intuition that I think underlies it cuts to the root of our understanding of human nature, and has significant implications for normative epistemic theory (I'll return to this below).

[32] Cf. Aristotle: "…it is the mark of an educated mind to expect that amount of exactness in each kind which the nature of the particular subject admits." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b)

Perhaps the most striking thing about Sarah's case is how unusual it *isn't*. It is a well-known and much-discussed fact that doubt is a regular part of faith, but it is an equally evident though neglected fact that belief in religious propositions comes and goes, and often without much of a fuss.[33] What's more, this may happen without one perceiving a significant disruption in one's faith practices, or even the importance those practices have with respect to the unifying role they play in one's life.[34] This is why it is possible for Sarah to reinforce her commitment to her religious practices, and think that she is simply recommitting to her faith, rather than transitioning to some radically new thing. I am not arguing, nor do I need to argue, that this is the case in the lives of a majority, or even very many, religious people. Indeed, I suspect it is a small minority, owing in part to the fact that many religious people do not reflect on religious propositions *at all*, and so have no occasion to believe or disbelieve them occurrently.[35] But if

[33] I focus here on religious faith, though similar things can surely be said for more general types of faith as well.

[34] I borrow this "unifying" language from Jonathan Kvanvig, who characterizes faith (following Dewey) as functioning in relation to an ideal that is "all-encompassing, so inclusive that it unifies or harmonizes the self." Kvanvig (2018), 60.

[35] I grant that they can and should often still be said to believe them dispositionally, though even here we would likely find variation among individuals with respect to what typical belief-behavior they'd be disposed to. One may, for example, have the tendency to act as if p, but lack the tendency to either verbally affirm that p (by virtue of not understanding p well enough to recognize it when stated precisely), or to use p as a premise in her theoretical reasoning (by virtue of a failure of rationality). These things are fluid, and one may be said to dispositionally believe that p in ways that vary in degree and kind with time and experience. Additionally, I grant that many religious people do have occasion to entertain various religious propositions occurrently from time to time—say, during the sermon on Sunday morning, or (unfortunately more likely) when confronted with a perceived threat to such beliefs, say, in the form of someone who represents an alternative belief system (for many evangelicals, for example, reflecting on the mere existence of Muslims can compel one to reaffirm to oneself one's doctrinal commitments). In such cases, however, I think it is more likely that what is being entertained or reaffirmed is not so much belief that p as it is a sense of one's social identity, a belongingness to one's community and one's fit in that community. An anonymous reviewer objects here that in order to follow a sermon, one must understand it, which would be evidenced by one's ability to note points of agreement and disagreement, and that this implies that one's beliefs are in play. This is certainly true. Nonetheless, many religious people do not follow the sermon in this sense. Or, put differently, they do not interpret the sermon (or other aspects of the liturgy) in such a way that the set of things they hold to be true about the world is altered. They, rather, approach the sermon in the same way they might approach a television show or a novel: its effect is primarily aesthetic, and insofar as they give assent to the propositions represented therein, they are effectively affirming their membership in a group that holds such things to be true. The evidence that this is a more accurate description of their cognitive state than "belief" is that many such people will not be able to answer basic questions about the propositions contained in the liturgy, indicating that they did not in fact understand it. They will undoubtedly affirm that it is true, but they will have no clear idea of what "it" means. I'm certainly not saying this is the norm for most religious people, but I think it is clearly the case for many, including people I know personally, and at various times, myself. It may be objected here that one should still be

even a few match Sarah's description—and I think this is obviously the case—then we have good reason to think that faith is compatible with disbelief.

There aren't many detailed objections in the literature to my thesis that faith and disbelief are compatible; I'll consider the few that there are in section IV below. Nonetheless, the thesis is nearly uniformly dismissed, even by those who take pains to provide non-doxastic accounts of faith. So, besides cases like Sarah's, which I take it give us prima facie reason to doubt that faith is incompatible with disbelief, are there positive arguments that can be given in support of the thesis?

The Oscillation Argument

Erin doubts that her favorite sports team will win the upcoming tournament.[36] However, the strength of her doubt varies wildly. At times she thinks it only somewhat unlikely (say, after they make a surprisingly decent showing), and at other times she is completely convinced they have no chance of defeating the better teams in the tournament. Nonetheless, her devotion remains unwavering: she watches every game, wears team memorabilia proudly, defends the team and its players from criticism, and even argues passionately with friends that her team may yet pull it out. When asked if the team will win the tournament, she replies (shouts), "Yes!" "How can you believe that?" her friend asks. "I didn't say I believed it," she responds, "I have faith."[37]

---

said to "believe" a proposition even if one does not strictly speaking understand its meaning. I think such people are more accurately described as having a proto-belief, or what Eric Schwitzgebel has called "in-between belief." [See Schwitzgebel (2001), especially the cases of Roshini and Antonio on pp. 77-78]. If this is right, then many lay religious people have what I think should uncontroversially be labeled religious "faith," while lacking full-fledged belief or disbelief.

[36] This case is borrowed and modified from Howard-Snyder (2013a), 357.

[37] One may reasonably wonder here whether one can have genuine faith in a sports team, or whether this is merely pretense. I can only say that the sports fans I know would not consider their commitment a pretense. For some of them, their team-community is as cohesive and durable as other communities they are a part of, and consequently their commitment to their team rivals that to other groups. For some, their team identity even seems to play a similar role that religious identity plays for others. I confess I do not understand this myself, but I have witnessed it. If one is invested enough in their team's success to fit my description of faith, I see no reason to withhold the label. Similar points apply to the next case. (Note that I say nothing about the health or appropriateness of such a commitment.)

Kevin doubts that his favorite television drama will end in a satisfying way. With the close of each new episode he watches, he thinks it less likely that the writers will be able to wrap things up sufficiently by the series' end. Occasionally, there are moments that make him think maybe the writers have a satisfying ending planned after all, but other times (after particularly baffling plot twists) he thinks there's no hope at all. Nonetheless, he watches every episode, encourages others to do the same, and unhesitatingly becomes emotionally invested in the characters and plotlines. "Do you really believe this can end well?" a friend asks. "No," says Kevin, "I don't believe it, but I have faith."

Thomas doubts that there is a good reason that God allowed his young child to die. Sometimes he is nearly certain there could be no such reason (such that if asked, he would vehemently deny that there is), and finds suggestions to the contrary horrific and utterly at odds with everything his past experience of what God is like has taught him. At other times, however (say, after reading the arguments of so-called skeptical theism), he is persuaded that there are many things about God and his plans that he simply cannot know. His opinion on this matter varies widely. Nonetheless, he remains committed to God and his religious community, and he maintains if asked that God must have some grander purpose in mind. "How can you believe that," a skeptical friend asks. "I'm not sure I do," Thomas admits, "but I have faith."

The thing to note about these cases is that in each, belief oscillates regularly and widely from relative confidence to serious doubt to full disbelief, and back again. But in each case, the subject would insist that he/she has faith that p, and would reject the claim that during the brief period in which his/her doubt crossed the threshold into disbelief, that his/her faith was thereby suspended. Erin is not merely a faithful fan when her team is doing well enough to inspire confidence (indeed, she likely has colorful names for such "fans"), nor is Thomas a man of faith

on Tuesday but not Wednesday. The faith remains constant through the oscillation of doubt, including during periods of disbelief. Therefore, faith is compatible with disbelief.

The Context Argument

Keith believes that humans have libertarian free will.[38] At any rate, this is a position he argues for, lectures on, and defends in conversation and in print. He is not so bold as to claim 100% confidence (he recognizes that many very clever counterarguments have been given), but he is normally very comfortable claiming belief in free will. Sometimes, he is even willing (say, while arguing very passionately with a colleague) to say that he *knows* that libertarianism is true. At *any* time, he would happily say that he has faith that it is true. Keith is then abducted by aliens (or dreams that he is, or whatever). The aliens show him a button that controls a planet-destroying device, and they demand that he tell them whether or not creatures of his kind have free will. If he gets the answer right, they say, they will release him, but if he gets it wrong, they will blow up Earth. Keith is suddenly not so confident that libertarianism is true. In fact, he is inclined to go with whatever the majority opinion of respected philosophers is, even if that is some form of determinism. Let's say he does this, and the aliens ask if he really believes his answer (they also inform him they will know if he is lying). At this moment, Keith is inclined to say that yes, he does believe determinism is true (or at least more likely than not—why else, he asks himself, would he be tempted to side with the majority?), which of course entails disbelief that libertarianism is true. Nonetheless, when recounting his story safely back on Earth (he either gave the correct answer, was somehow rescued, or woke up), he insists that his *faith* that humans have free will never wavered.

[38] The inspiration for this argument comes from some comments I once heard Keith DeRose give at a conference.

This argument is similar to the Oscillation Argument, but rather than strength of doubt, it focuses on the importance of context for determining belief.[39] Faith, to be sure, is also context-sensitive, but importantly, not coextensively with belief. Some contexts may have a large effect on belief—even to the point of undermining it—and virtually no effect on faith. Therefore, faith is compatible with disbelief.

The Volition Argument

Yao is a Pentecostal Christian in a congregation that believes that the "spiritual gift" of speaking in tongues is a normal and beneficial part of the Christian religious experience. Yao strongly desires to speak in tongues, and he thinks it would be a very good thing if he did. However, after praying for a long time for this gift, attempting many times to receive it, and having many long conversations about it with friends, Yao no longer has any confidence that he will ever speak in tongues. In fact, he admits to believing that he will not. Should we say that Yao has faith that he will speak in tongues? As things presently stand (let's say he's long since given up trying), the answer seems to be no. Speaking in tongues is not currently occupying the right kind of role in Yao's life to deserve the title of faith. But what about back when he was actively trying to obtain the gift? At that time, it seems appropriate to say that Yao had faith that he would speak in tongues—he certainly had the requisite pro-attitude, conative attitude, resilience, and cognitive attitude (it may have been belief, but this is not necessary—it could also have been Schellenbergian assent or Howard-Snyder's assuming). But the difference between then and now is merely that Yao has stopped trying. If he were to begin again, adopting, say, something like Schellenbergian assent as his cognitive attitude, then it seems we ought to again be able to say that he has faith that he will speak in tongues. But there is no reason to think that his disbelief in

[39] Schwitzgebel (2001) notes something similar when he says that one can be "at a single time, disposed quite confidently to assert one thing in one sort of situation and to assert its opposite in another." (p. 79)

the proposition that he will speak in tongues would change (until, of course, he actually speaks in tongues). Yao is here *willing* himself to pursue the spiritual gift, despite his disbelief that he will receive it (hence the name of the argument), precisely because of its importance in his life. And so, if asked, Yao will report that he has faith that he will speak in tongues (he may even believe that it is important that he affirm this to himself and others), and he will simultaneously admit, perhaps with some shame, that he believes that he will not. Therefore, we should say that faith is compatible with disbelief.[40]

Thus far, these arguments have focused on faith-that rather than faith-in. This is primarily because I take it to be the harder case to make of the two. If it is possible to have a non-doxastic propositional account of faith, where "propositional" is understood as providing the content for *that*- clauses, then it seems like a small step to say that one could also have non-doxastic, *non*-propositional accounts of faith as well. In these latter cases (recall that the proposals mentioned above included suggestions like attitude, affection, and hope), what one believes about various propositions sometimes seems irrelevant to the question of whether one has faith-in, since here we're usually talking about one's relationship with a person, and it is easier to see how one could maintain faith in a person that she knows in spite of wavering beliefs related to the person, than it is to see how one could maintain faith that some state of affairs obtains while harboring serious

[40] This sort of volitional faith has some biblical precedent. In Mark 9:14-29, Jesus exorcises a demon that his disciples had tried and failed to cast out, saying to the boy's father, "Everything is possible for one who believes." The father replies, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (NIV) Given that *pistis* and *apistia* are here best understood in the sense of "trust," and that the presence of *apistia* hinders Jesus's miraculous ability elsewhere in Mark (see especially 6:1-6), it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus accepts the father's *act* as *pistis*, despite his reported *apistia*. Teresa Morgan notes of this passage that the boy's father "is acknowledging what the disciples never do but Mark does: that *pistis* may not be perfect, but may be—perhaps, for most people, always is—entangled with its opposites." (She also notes here that other commentators are wrong to suggest that *pistis* and *apistia* are "incompatible in the New Testament as they are not elsewhere.") Of course, there is not sufficient evidence to claim that the father *disbelieved* that Jesus could heal his son, though given the chronic nature of the affliction and the fact that the disciples had failed in their attempt, such an attitude would be neither unlikely nor unreasonable. See Morgan (2015), esp. 357 and fn. 40.

doubt or even disbelief about the truth of the propositions that express this. Unfortunately, space prohibits me from giving the same attention to the faith-in proposals that I have to the faith-that proposals, though this would certainly be a worthwhile endeavor. Suffice to say that if my arguments in favor of the compatibility of faith-that with disbelief are successful, then it is likely that faith-in will not present any unique challenges, since the resistance to my thesis is tied to the presumed strength of the cognitive stance assumed for faith.

IV. Objections and Replies

I turn now to objections to my thesis. I'll first consider two that appear in the literature, and then raise some of my own.

i. Robert Audi provides an objection to the thesis that faith is compatible with disbelief in the context of distinguishing propositional faith *from* belief:

> One reason why (propositional) faith may seem to imply belief is that it is apparently incompatible with *dis*belief. If I believe that not-*p*, surely I cannot have faith that *p*, just as I cannot (at least normally) believe both that *p* and that not-*p*. I *can* have such faith compatibly with an absence of any feeling of confidence regarding *p*, and even with a belief that *p* is not highly probable. But if I disbelieve *p*, I do not have faith that *p*.[41]

He continues in a footnote:

> I am distinguishing between separate beliefs of contradictories and beliefs of a contradiction. The case against the possibility of the former seems less strong than that against the possibility of the latter, but I leave its possibility open. Arguably we should, for similar reasons, leave open the possibility of having faith that *p* even while disbelieving it. It may be, however, that faith is *dominant* in a way belief is not, so that genuine faith that *p* rules out the kind of negative attitude toward *p* implicit in disbelieving it.

Audi's objection seems to be that there is an analogy between having faith that p while disbelieving it, and believing a contradiction. Two points in reply: first, it is not clear that one cannot believe a contradiction. Audi recognizes in his footnote that it is harder to argue that one

[41] Audi (2008), 97.

cannot believe two contradictory things separately than it is to argue that one cannot directly believe a contradiction, but even the latter sort of case has its defenders.[42] In any case, even if we grant Audi's point about believing contradictions, this is not analogous to having faith that p while disbelieving p for the simple reason that (as Audi admits and even argues) having faith that p does not require believing that p. We may safely dismiss this analogy by simply gesturing toward any of the proposals mentioned above where the cognitive component of propositional faith can be constituted by something other than belief. For example, accepting that p is not directly contradictory to disbelieving it in the way that believing it is. However, the crux of Audi's point seems to be that faith is "dominant" in a way belief isn't, "so that genuine faith that *p* rules out the kind of negative attitude toward *p* implicit in disbelieving it." I think he means that faith that p implies a positive attitude toward p (on this we are all agreed), and that disbelief implies a negative attitude. But why think that? I do not believe that I will awake as a millionaire, but I have a very positive attitude toward that proposition. This sort of worry is given more content by Daniel Howard-Snyder, so I'll turn to him.

ii. After noting that faith allows for probabilistic beliefs (like "p is more likely than not") to stand in for the required cognitive stance, Howard-Snyder turns to disbelief:

> A question naturally arises at this point: if faith that p does not require believing p, is it compatible with *dis*-believing p? I think not. For if you disbelieve p, you will have tendencies to behavior, feeling, and so on that are at odds with faith that p. For example, if I disbelieve that my marriage will last, I'll tend to say it won't, when asked; I'll tend to feel it to be the case that it won't when I consider the matter; I'll tend to use the proposition that it won't as a premise in my practical reasoning; and I'll tend to do things appropriate to its not lasting, for example, withdraw from intimacy, look for another place to live, and the like. The incongruity of faith and disbelief suggests that faith requires a more *positive* cognitive stance toward its object precisely because the dispositional profiles of negative stances like disbelief are incongruent with faith.[43]

[42] For an argument that one can (indeed, must) believe a contradiction (indeed, an infinite number of them), see Sorensen (2001).

[43] Howard-Snyder (2013a), 361.

Here I think we get a sense for what Audi must have been after. Referring here to Alston's response profile, Howard-Snyder claims that the dispositions of disbelief are fundamentally at odds with those of belief, and since faith requires positive dispositions, faith and disbelief are incongruous. But why think that *in every case* (for that is what's required if faith is incompatible with disbelief, full stop) disbelief carries only negative dispositions of the sort that would be hostile to faith? Even in his own example this is not clear. Granted, if one disbelieves that one's marriage will last, one will likely be disposed to admit that one thinks it won't when asked, but one needn't *insist* that it won't; similarly, one will probably tend to feel it to be the case that it won't last when considering the matter, but one needn't thereby *declare* it to oneself with finality; likewise, one may tend to use the proposition that it won't last in one's practical reasoning (this is only expedient), but one needn't *ignore* avenues of action that might have some chance of changing the situation for the better.[44] And Howard-Snyder's claims that one would tend to do things like withdraw from intimacy and look for other places to live clearly imply more than mere disbelief. They imply *indifference,* or at least resignation. And these attitudes, I admit, are incompatible with faith of any kind.[45] But disbelief obviously need not imply either, and this is easy to see in cases like those I have given above, and even in Howard-Snyder's own

[44] See also Malcolm and Scott (2017), p. 269, who argue that pretense for the sake of children serves as a counterexample to Howard-Snyder's claim. I concur wholeheartedly with their claim there that:

> If treating a proposition that we do not believe as true on the basis of pragmatic considerations is sufficient for faith, why can't similar considerations lead us to have faith in a proposition that we disbelieve? One may desire that *p* is true, see the moral advantages of being for *p*, recognise the social merit in supporting *p*, and so on, while believing *p* to be untrue. The resulting positive cognitive attitude can still play a functional role that is similar to belief…Once the belief condition is jettisoned and pragmatic considerations determine the positive cognitive attitudes we have towards various propositions, it is no longer clear why believing in the falsity of *p* is an obstacle to going along with it.

They take this to be a problem with non-doxastic accounts of faith, while I take it to be a strength.

[45] Howard-Snyder includes indifference in his list of the "enemies of faith," along with misevaluation, hostility, and faintheartedness. Note that none of these entail or are entailed by disbelief.

case if we adjust it slightly so that the person cares about his marriage and is making dedicated attempts to save it, even while disbelieving that he will be successful. This may count as faith.

Other objections:

iii. Sometimes faith-that really is incompatible with disbelief. How can one believe that he will not pass the course (maybe because he didn't do any of the assignments), but still have faith that he will pass?

This objection is wholly correct and wholly irrelevant. Recall that my argument is not that faith-that *entails* disbelief, nor even that disbelief is a *usual* or *common* part of faith, merely that it is compatible with it. To show this, I need only find one convincing case where the two coexist.

iv. "Faith" seems to be used equivocally in your account and those you reference. Can I have "faith" in your vague sense if I just say that I do?

No. Refer again to Kvanvig's characterization of "fundamental" faith, and to Howard-Snyder's list of necessary constituents of propositional faith. These things provide a minimal structure for anything that is to count as faith in the sense we're interested in, and it is not an entirely lenient one. Yes, the domain may vary (so that "faith" in a sports team and "faith" in God both count as faith, though they occupy different domains), but the requirements for the role a faith-candidate must play *within* a given domain are constant. More specificity will be given in the responses to the following objections.

v. Does the account show that *too many* things can count as faith? Can I be said to have faith that Kant's categorical imperative is a solid basis for morality, while disbelieving his arguments in support of it? Let's stipulate that I think it would be wonderful if it was true, want (even desire) it to be true, assume that it is true for practical purposes (such as working out what I ought to do in

certain situations), and that I am resilient about it in the face of counter-evidence. But all the while I disbelieve it. Is this really faith?

No, because the pro-attitude component of faith has what I will call a *proximity* condition built into it. That is, not just anything can serve as an object of faith; it must be something that can play the "unifying" role I have mentioned in one's life (see note 27), and this implies that one's evaluation of its goodness or desirability will not be merely objective—I must be able to evaluate it as good or desirable *for me*. This "proximity" of the object to me (i.e. to my goals, projects, values, identity, etc.) determines whether or not it is the sort of thing that I can commit myself to in the way required for faith. I cannot so commit myself to the categorical imperative, as it is simply too distant to inspire the sort of immediate interest needed for the right kind of pro-attitude.[46]

vi. Follow-up to v: Fine, let's find a case where the proximity is as close as you like. Say, my experience of pain and pleasure: can my orientation towards pleasure (specified appropriately with respect to all the requisite attitudes: cognitive, conative, evaluative, etc.) count as faith that I will experience it if I disbelieve that I will?

Yes, provided that it serves the sort of unifying role in your life that I've mentioned. Imagine someone who, due to some unfortunate neurological condition, lives with a constant dull state of pain. This person, though incapable of understanding pleasure fully, can at least get

[46] Laura Buchak has argued for a similar criterion for faith in her "risky commitment" account, which holds that "a subject has faith in some candidate proposition if he is willing to commit to taking risks on the proposition without examining additional evidence." See her (2017), p. 115. Her account is also similar to mine in that it allows one to pursue long-term projects on the basis of one's faith commitment without changes in evidence undermining one's faith. However, my account differs from Buchak's in several ways, including her emphasis on the rationality of faith (I am concerned here only with its possible compatibility with disbelief), and her requirement that faith be actively resistant to obtaining further evidence insofar as that evidence pertains to one's action. For example, she says, "Not only do individuals with faith not need further evidence, they will choose not to obtain it if it is offered to them, when their only interest in obtaining it is in how it bears on the decision to act." (p. 114) I do not consider this a requirement for propositional faith.

a sense of what it must be by imagining the opposite of her normal experience. She has no reason to believe that she ever will experience it, as the doctors have assured her that her condition is incurable. Nonetheless, if she chooses to orient her life around the assumption that she will one day experience pleasure, even as she disbelieves it, I see no reason that this should not count as faith.

vii. Would your account allow for a naturalist analogue of Sarah, who "sees goodness in others, and experiences, both in them and alone in meditation, a sense of fulfilment…" etc., but who holds no naturalistic beliefs?[47]

On my account, the naturalist would have faith in naturalistic propositions if they play the right kind of role in her life, even if she currently disbelieves them. Take the proposition (it's more difficult to locate characteristic naturalistic propositions than it is to locate religious ones) "There are no transcendent moral norms." Say the naturalist doubts this proposition, and that her doubt occasionally slides into outright disbelief, especially while considering particularly heinous acts of oppression and violence. Nonetheless, the proposition plays an important role in grounding her sense of solidarity with humanity—she cannot stomach the idea that a deity is responsible for our obligations to one another—and so she maintains faith in the proposition that she disbelieves because it helps her to connect with her fellow humans by virtue of being "all in this together," the only source of hope that any of us have. Similarly, Sarah maintains faith in certain propositions that she now disbelieves, e.g. "People are created in the image of God," or "Jesus will establish his kingdom on the earth," or "God loves me." These propositions, while strictly false, express for Sarah more compellingly than anything else her sense of the intrinsic value of humanity, her belief that that value will be realized in the social sphere, and her

[47] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this objection, and the next.

motivation for attributing that value to others (i.e. she experiences herself as so valued). In Sarah's opinion, no naturalistic or scientific or otherwise non-religious way of approaching similar ideas captures the significance of these truths quite like the Christian propositions, and these propositions play the kind of unifying, proximate role in Sarah's life that I've described as an element of faith. It seems to me that Sarah's view on this is consistent, and that to insist that she must either still believe the religious propositions or that she mustn't really have faith in them, is to artificially restrict the cognitive options in a way that does not best fit the experiential data. At any rate, Sarah is not intended to constitute an argument for disbelieving faith; her role is simply to illustrate the need for a broader notion of faith that can account for people with experiences like hers, people who disbelieve religious propositions, but for whom some of those propositions remain extremely important, or for whom those propositions were never any more important than they are now, including when they believed them.

viii. Do the subjects in the imagined cases really have faith *at the same time as* they disbelieve? For example, can Thomas honestly say, at a single moment, "I believe that there is no good reason why God allowed my son to die, but I have faith that there is"?

First: note that I am arguing that it is possible to have faith that p while disbelieving p, not that some people would report or believe that they have faith that p while disbelieving p. People's reports of their own propositional attitudes are often our best evidence for them, but they may be overridden by other considerations, such as the fact that one's behavioral dispositions strongly conflict with her reports. For example, suppose Sarah were to claim that she believes that God exists (while keeping intact all her other behavioral dispositions as described above), but we witness her consistently say and do things that conflict with this belief, such as advancing arguments against God's existence, expressing skepticism of others' reasons to think

that God does exist, snickering when she hears someone assert that God exists, etc. It seems best to say in this case that Sarah really does not believe that God exists, despite her report to the contrary (assuming that she does not also exhibit behavior that counteracts this unbelieving behavior). The same should be said of faith. If someone reports that she does not have faith that p, but her behavioral dispositions put the lie to this claim, then we should conclude that she does in fact have faith that p.

Second: faith, as Howard-Snyder has argued, implies a certain resilience in the face of counter-evidence to p, and resilience is not something that can be discerned by freezing one's response to p at an instant. If resilience is something that can only be discerned over time through one's habit of responding to counter-evidence to p, then faith can only be discerned over time, not in a momentary response to the question, "Do you have faith that p?"

Third: say it is true that a person would not say, while disbelieving, that they have faith, but would say, later, that their faith remained continuous through the oscillation into disbelief. Which account should we privilege in our attempt to understand the nature of faith? It seems to me that the considered judgment should be weighted somewhat more heavily than the expression of a lack of faith while in the throes of doubt. The reason relates to the point just made: faith implies resilience in the face of challenges, and one is only in a position to judge the continuity of her faith once she's gained some perspective on this resilience. Of course there is bound to be disagreement between people who have gone through such periods of doubt and disbelief; doubtless some of them would say that they did indeed lose faith. But some, I think, would not, and this is enough to move us away from a view of faith which requires that it is incompatible with disbelief. For example, I myself, and I suspect many others, have experienced both disbelief and what I can only describe as faith in certain propositions simultaneously, such as the

proposition that I will be resurrected by God. It seems to me now that my faith in this proposition has remained continuous, including during periods of disbelief. I think that we should believe that people in this position had faith during their periods of disbelief because this is their report and we have no good, non-question-begging reason to discount it. For a prominent example, consider Mother Teresa, who wrote:

> In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not really existing (Jesus, please forgive my blasphemies—I have been told to write everything)…What do I labour for? If there be no God—there can be no soul.—If there is no soul then Jesus—You also are not true…In my heart there is no faith—no love—no trust…I do not doubt that it was You who called me, with so much love and force.—It was You—I know. That is why the work is Yours and it is You even now-but I have no faith—I don't believe.—Jesus, don't let my soul be deceived—nor let me deceive anyone.[48]

While we should not take Mother Teresa to be giving a philosophical analysis of her cognitive dispositions here, it seems clear that she claims to disbelieve (and to lack faith), while simultaneously claiming to "know" that God was calling her, and while obviously continuing to live in a way that exemplifies an attitude of faith. What of her claim that she had "no faith"? It is likely that she is thinking of faith in the traditional doxastic way here, hence her conjunction of the claims "I have no faith—I don't believe." In the sense I have given to faith, Teresa's claims are explicable: she is struggling to maintain her faith during periods of disbelief. On a doxastic account of faith, one must conclude (as she herself says) that when she loses belief, she loses faith. I submit that this is the weaker explanation for the following reason: Teresa plainly has the other required components for faith that we've discussed: the pro-attitude, the conative stance, the resilience, the unifying role in her life, and the proximity to her self-identity. There is no evidence that any of these so much as waver during her periods of doubt and disbelief. What

[48] Mother Teresa (2007), 192-193.

non-question-begging reason could there be to insist that she nonetheless lacks faith that God is with her when writing this prayer that I've quoted? Or perhaps one might think it is better to interpret Teresa as experiencing the "dark night of the soul," in the sense that her apparent expressions of disbelief might really be non-cognitive expressions of feeling abandoned by a God she still believes in. The thing to note here is that the dark night experience is not incompatible with cognitive doubt or disbelief. As Steven Payne says,

> In John's [of the Cross] sixteenth century Spanish milieu, where no one seriously questioned the existence of God, contemplatives experienced the disorientation of this passive night primarily as a threat to their own self-esteem; today, when the existence of God is no longer generally taken for granted, the same upheaval may challenge a person's belief in a loving Creator."[49]

Something like this seems to have happened to Mother Teresa, as abandonment, doubt, and disbelief are all present in her writing.

ix. Can one have faith that something morally repugnant is the case (including orienting their life around it in the requisite way), but deny sincerely that they believe the relevant propositions? For example, can an active white supremacist deny belief in racist propositions while clearly exhibiting faith in racist ideals?

Yes, but this is no objection to my argument, as I have said nothing about the *justifiability* or ethical dimensions of faith, whether accompanied by belief or not. This is a fascinating area of inquiry, to be sure, but not one I have time to get into here.[50]

x. In the end, is your account of faith really distinct from hope?

Yes. As Audi notes, hope does not require a pro-attitude. One may, for example, hope for something one is ashamed of.[51] Hope may also lack the cognitive component required for faith-

---

[49] Payne (1990), 75.

[50] Audi provides some comments on issues related to this near the end of his (2008), and both Schellenberg (2016) and Bishop (2007) are concerned with the ethical dimensions of faith.

[51] Audi (2008), 97.

that altogether—e.g. one may hope for future success without believing, trusting, accepting, assenting, or assuming that it will come to pass. One may respond here that for hope, it is necessary that one think that the hoped-for thing is *possible*, and that countenancing the epistemic possibility of p should count as a cognitive attitude.[52] One may also insist that in fact hope *does* require a pro-attitude, since even in the case of hoping for something one is ashamed of, there must be some aspect of the hoped-for thing that one finds desirable, even if only subconsciously. One may reply here that hope must be a conscious attitude, but this seems unmotivated to me. If these replies are correct, then hope does require a cognitive component and a positive evaluation of p, and hope and faith therefore become difficult to disentangle on my account. Here again the proximity condition I mentioned above is helpful, since hope does not seem to me to require that its object be immediately available to me for commitment in the sense of playing a unifying role in my life. This, I think, serves to adequately distinguish hope from faith in many cases, even if the above responses are correct. However, there doubtless will be cases of hope whose objects do play such a unifying role, and are immediate in the right way. For such cases, hope and faith may be theoretically indistinguishable on my account, except to note, as I have done, that for hope these are not necessary conditions. But I do not consider this much of an issue, since in such cases hope and faith may also be *phenomenally* indistinguishable. A Christian, for example, may both hope for and have faith in a future bodily resurrection, without being able to distinguish what separates the two attitudes.

V. Closing Thoughts

I said above that if my thesis is correct, then the meager attention to disbelief in the faith literature would be mistaken, and that this would be an instructive mistake. What I mean is that

[52] I owe this objection to Daniel Howard-Snyder.

the intuition that underlies the dismissal of the faith-disbelief combo arises from a basic assumption about human beings: that we are inherently rational (recall Audi's analogy regarding believing contradictions). I do not of course deny that reason is a major feature of human nature. But faith is a driving force of human life, and one often seen in the history of philosophical and religious thought as in tension with reason. Recent accounts of faith, as we've seen, are moving toward non-doxastic understandings, and should this trend continue, the standard view of faith as a largely rational enterprise may begin to give way. If it does, this will undoubtedly alter the discussion surrounding the rationality and justifiability of religious belief, not least because it will have to account for not merely belief and other cognitive attitudes, but affective, conative, volitional, and other non-cognitive attitudes as well, along with the actions and action dispositions they engender. My own contribution here is merely a drop in this sea, but it serves to drive the wedge further between faith and belief.

This wedge has practical significance. Guilt over experiencing doubt and disbelief is still all-too-common in religious contexts (at least the ones with which I am the most familiar), and a re-orienting of the faith discussion away from belief at the theoretical level may have a beneficial trickle-down effect socially. In closing his essay on belief and acceptance, William Alston notes that for those who find certain essential religious doctrines hard to swallow (perhaps owing to little more than their place in history), a move away from belief will allow them to access those doctrines through other cognitive modes.[53] This would, I think, be a welcome allowance for many people of faith.

[53] Alston (1996), 26.

References

Alston, William P. (1996). Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith. In Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Ed.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* (pp. 3-27). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Aristotle. (1934). *Nicomachean Ethics*. In H. Rackham (Trans.), *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 19*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Audi, Robert. (2008). Belief, Faith, and Acceptance. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 63, 87-102.

Bishop, John. (2007). *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Buchak, Laura. (2017). Faith and Steadfastness in the Face of Counter-Evidence. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 81, 113-133.

Churchland, Paul M. (1981). Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes. *Journal of Philosophy*, 78, 67-90.

Clegg, Jerry S. (1979). Faith. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16, 225-232.

Dennett, Daniel C. (1987). *The Intentional Stance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Dretske, Fred. (1988). *Explaining Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fodor, Jerry A. (1975). *The Language of Thought*. New York: Cromwell.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel. (2013a). Propositional Faith: What It Is and What It Is Not. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 50(4), 357-372.

_____. (2013b). Schellenberg on Propositional Faith. *Religious Studies*, 49(2), 181-194.

Kvanvig, Jonathan. (2016). The Idea of Faith as Trust: Lessons in Noncognitivist Approaches to Faith. In Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower (Ed.), *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne* (pp. 4-25). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. (2018). Dewey, Epistemic Fetishism, and Classical Theism. In *Faith and Humility* (pp. 57-102). New York: Oxford University Press.

Malcolm, Finlay, and Michael Scott. (2017) Faith, Belief and Fictionalism. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 98(S1), 257-274.

Morgan, Teresa. (2015). *Roman Faith and Christian Faith:* Pistis *and* Fides *in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mugg, Joshua. (2016). In Defence of the Belief-Plus Model of Faith. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 8(2), 201-219.

Payne, Steven. (1990). *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Pojman, Louis. (1986). Faith Without Belief? *Faith and Philosophy*, 3(2), 157-176.

Schellenberg, J.L. (2005). On Religious Faith (II). In *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 127-166). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____. (2016). Working with Swinburne: Belief, Value, and the Religious Life. In Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower (Ed.), *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne* (pp. 26-45). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schwitzgebel, Eric. (2001). In-Between Believing. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 51(202), 76-82.

_____. (2015). Belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/belief/>.

Simpson, Thomas W. (2012). What Is Trust? *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 93(4), 550-569.

Sorensen, Roy. (2001). *Vagueness and Contradiction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tennant, Frederick R. (1943). *The Nature of Belief*. London: Centenary Press.

Teresa, Mother. (2007). *Come Be My Light*. New York: Doubleday.

Titelbaum, Michael G. (Forthcoming). *Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.